

Lesson Plan: Metaphor and figurative language in English

Level	Advanced (C1–C2)
Time	60–90 minutes
Skills	Vocabulary, speaking, writing
Focus	Conceptual metaphor (TIME IS MONEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR); dead vs. live metaphors; extended metaphors; clichés

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the role of conceptual metaphor in everyday and formal English
- Recognise and use common conceptual metaphors across different domains
- Use figurative language to make writing more vivid and persuasive
- Distinguish between dead metaphors, live metaphors, extended metaphors, and clichés

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Conceptual metaphors — everyday English is built on them

- TIME IS MONEY: spend time, waste time, invest time, save time, run out of time
- ARGUMENT IS WAR: attack a position, defend your view, shoot down an idea, win an argument
- LIFE IS A JOURNEY: reach a goal, be at a crossroads, follow a path, hit a dead end
- IDEAS ARE FOOD: digest information, half-baked idea, food for thought, chew over a problem

Dead vs. live metaphors

- Dead metaphor: so common it's no longer felt as figurative: foot of a mountain, arms of a chair
- Live metaphor: still vivid and striking: 'The economy is haemorrhaging jobs.'
- Extended metaphor: one metaphor sustained across multiple sentences for cumulative effect

Clichés and when to avoid them

- Overused until impact is lost: 'at the end of the day', 'perfect storm', 'paradigm shift'
- A well-chosen live metaphor can make an abstract point concrete and memorable
- In academic writing: use figurative language sparingly and deliberately

Meaning & Nuance

Type	Description	Example
Conceptual metaphor	System of expression based on structural analogy	Time is money: spend/waste/invest/save time
Dead metaphor	Used so often it no longer feels figurative	The foot of the page / table leg
Live metaphor	Still vivid and felt as figurative	The report eviscerated the argument.
Extended metaphor	One metaphor sustained across a passage	The company navigating turbulent waters...
Cliché	Overused — has lost its impact	Think outside the box / level playing field

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Spot the metaphor (10 min)

Task: Students underline all metaphors in a short paragraph.

- 'The project is a minefield. We need to navigate carefully to avoid derailing the initiative.'
- Discuss: what underlying concepts do these metaphors draw on?

2. Presentation (15 min)

Task: Conceptual metaphors — the hidden structures of everyday English.

- Dead vs. live: students judge which are still 'felt' as metaphors.
- Clichés: the graveyard of live metaphors — they died of overuse.

3. Metaphor analysis task (20 min)

Task: Analyse how a well-known speech or text uses metaphor.

- Identify conceptual metaphors. What effect do they create?
- Could the same ideas be expressed literally? What would be lost?

4. Extended metaphor writing (25 min)

Task: Write a short paragraph using an extended metaphor of your choice.

- Ideas: describe learning, ageing, or political change through a sustained metaphor.
- Share and discuss: is it clear? Does it feel forced?

TEACHER NOTES

- Lakoff and Johnson's 'Metaphors We Live By' is the foundation of this lesson's framework — mention to interested students.
- Conceptual metaphor analysis is a rich critical thinking task alongside the vocabulary focus.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Find 5 examples of conceptual metaphors in an English newspaper or speech.
2. Write a short descriptive paragraph using an extended metaphor throughout.
3. Identify 3 clichés in a text and replace them with original, vivid figurative language.